

## NZ Spam Vol 2 # 2

Like it or not – a SECOND issue!

It is a lazy Monday afternoon. Having been here on the S. Island before, we can afford an occasional day off from any mad rush of “got to see.....” It is nice. We did go out this morning about 9:30 AM while it was still cool, expecting to walk from here to Albertown along the Clutha River. The Clutha is the longest of NZ rivers and one of a rare number of glacier melt rivers that runs freely to the sea – its waters (perhaps from snow that fell hundreds (if not thousands) of years ago and been compressed to ice and melted off the leading edge of the glacier) remain clear, and a deeply reflective blue its whole course. It is helped by having the opportunity to settle out any residual sediment in Lake Wanaka (4th largest in NZ, 74 sq miles, >980 feet deep) before beginning its journey. Unfortunately for us the river like the lake has swollen over its usual banks due to heavy RAIN for much of the last 2 weeks. Yes, that stuff that we left WA to get away from!! All the beaches that families expected to enjoy, having booked their holiday homes months ago when the kids are on Christmas-New Year’s break are still under water. So were parts of our trail along the river. We did not come prepared for fording, so hung onto small trees along the upper bank as we worked to get around these. Not real big or real deep, just did not want to walk with wet shoes. Finally gave up.



We did our stream fording last Saturday.

We were *supposed* to go hot-air ballooning over Queenstown. Got up at 3:30 AM (yes, dark hours), so we could be met an hour away in time to get the balloon aloft in the cool morning air (the only time they fly in summer) and to see the sunrise. They called just as we were leaving town to tell us, “too windy, unsafe, canceled.” We are booked again for this Thursday. IF the current nice weather holds. INSTEAD, I booked us for the “Siberia experience.”

We drove 45 min up the road to Makarora. From there they flew us in a 5-6 seat Cessna for 50 min – including a loop around Mt. Aspiring (9,950 feet). These are “young” craggy mountains, not yet worn to smoother contours. (Geologists estimate that rocks and sediment once overlay volcanic layers under the ocean. Under pressure and time these became the somewhat flaky rock (“shist”) that predominates the area and were then about 220 million years ago, upthrust as the local plate buckled. About 10 thousands years ago, the last ice age carved out the glacier valleys.) Those that reached the sea are very much like those in Norway. These do not reach that far. My Aspire is often called the Matterhorn of the South due to its sharp angular appearance.

We landed on a grass strip and then forded the river in glacier melt water to our knees (if we were careful – deeper if we were not). They had supplied us plastic clogs (with heel strap) for this purpose. They did not tell us that within the first 30 min there would be three MORE streams to cross (these would have been no problem had they not been swollen by recent rains). We found that out only AFTER drying off, packing away the clogs, and re-socking and booting. They simply dropped us off. Said “that way out – see you at 4:30 for your jet-boat pick up when you can’t go any further” and flew off again. Wenche: “WE are in the wilderness ALONE?” Yup. But there were to be one more plane and one helicopter drop off after us. We would not be the last ones out. Lots of fun. 8K (5 miles, some long stretches of fairly gentle up, but mostly tending down, some steeply so - (given the choice ALWAYS choose to hike OUT of a river valley – water does flow down hill) – we passed a couple who did it the other way – mostly up hill, but then they were also in their 20s).



The jet boat (on time, but the last group with 3 kids were not – we had to wait about 45 min), was fun. The well seasoned driver took great pleasure in inducing gasps and screams out of Wenche who sat close beside him in a crowded boat (family of 5, 4 20-somethings from Spain, 2 trampers returning from 4 days of “free-camping” in the wilderness-2 in rain, and us). These near flat (steel) bottomed jet boats, invented in NZ require only 6 inches of water, are very fast, and turn on a dime. He must have done at least 5 full 360\*s at high speed to the delight of all.



This narrative is moving backwards. 2 – 3 weeks ago, went down to the Catlins – the SE corner of the South Island. We had been there before, but pleased again to see Nugget Point (named for the “nuggets” off the point of land (in the right season and sun, they appear golden). Driving along the coast just inside the Nugget Point preserve we found a Yellow-eyed penguin standing beside the road. His (OK, it could be a “her”) intent seemed to be to cross the road into the brush, where they tend to nest. But, they do not do anything fast on land. He just stood there, contemplating his next move. But, with my window down he just posed, over and over again for me (“how is this, like the neck out?” “How about twisted around to by back?” “Did you get the yellow eye? – shoot that one again?” “You think I should jump off the rock?” “That will take me another 20 min to decide”).



Half the pleasure of going anywhere in NZ is just driving the road. We either have beside us an incredible blue lake or river, hills or mountains, tussock grass fields, wild flowers, sheep, deer or cattle on green hills – all of them “happy” and

thus making better meat, milk, or wool (Wenche has bought sweaters for all 4 of “our kids” and of course more than one outfit for the grand-son who is by now maybe beginning to ask “if I am an air-breathing mammal what am I doing in this bag of salt water with no breast in sight?”). The tall trees extending above the broadleaf forest canopy are Rimu. It is all over NZ, but thick stands have been logged off in most areas. They may be 700 – 1000 years old, and are largely survivors of a prior more favorable climate. Very few young or intermediate trees are found.

Last week (a warm up for the bigger trek) we drove around Lake Wanaka to a short trek (3K up and back) to Diamond Lake and its lookout.



I survived the New Year's Holiday and did not kill anybody. Kiwis come from all over the S. Island to Wanaka to get drunk on NYE. But, it is never too early to begin practicing for the big day. So 30 Dec I got called to the police station at 3:30 AM to draw a blood alcohol on a 17 year old driver who was clearly intoxicated. Mind you I have not drawn my own blood since med-school, but fortunately he had good veins, and got him on first stick. A few days later we treated an AC (shoulder) separation and laceration on a young rodeo rider who WON the contest – but then got stepped on by one of the protection horses (the ones that rush out and escort the bucking horse away from the fallen rider). His only concern was whether he could ride the next week. Last week I got called in to meet an ambulance with a young man (drunk of course). Seems he had had a fight with his girlfriend, then went out to sooth his ego with liquid reinforcement only to get beat up by a “skater punk,” so he decides to slash his L arm at 3 places, none deep enough, and take all of his available Prozac and Seroquel (fortunately, neither is lethal). As he was brought in 4 hours after the likely ingestion, not much to do but watch him as we sewed him up. Another young visitor to town was welcomed by equally inebriated locals with a large “torch” (flashlight) across the head and arms a few times. More sewing in the night. A badly fractured and dislocated ankle – just splinted and shipped 1 hour to the 12 bed hospital who could X-ray her do a better job of splinting and then send her 3 more hours to the teaching hospital with an orthopedic service. Made one HouseCall (with Wenche driving at night) to some way out farm house to tell a guy his leg would live till morning, but he had to show up in AM and likely be transferred for his recurrent arterial occlusion. But, no truly dying patients. Thank God.

They continue to amaze me how they use my time. Recently a visitor from Indonesia was treated by me for some minor problem. He came back an hour later with a brief insurance form (typical, name, date, dx, Rx). ALL of this was in my note – ANYBODY could have filled it out. But, I was given the entirely blank form to fill out while my next patient was delayed (and the guy with the form had to wait until they could give it to me on finishing the patient I was with on his arrival). I gave up on finding clean ear speculums – so I now carry my own supply in a little plastic bag to whatever room I am assigned and wash them myself with an alcohol sponge at the end of the day). If I need more paper for a printer, I scrounge around till I find it. I soooooo want to get on my soapbox about using a doctor efficiently and at his/her highest level of training and earning capacity, but I am only a guest and a quite happy one at that. I get paid a flat amount per shift. Does not matter if I am worked efficiently or not. In December, I saw about 250 patients (but only 4 days per week). Extrapolate to the usual 4.5 days of U.S. and one gets 281 and one could not pay the bills. But, I did get to clean about 60 disposable ear speculums, and call and ready each of those patients myself. AND, I got to hunt around for maybe 10 minutes between the 3 colleagues who happen to have an ophthalmoscope so I would have a blue light source for a fluorescein stain exam of an eye -- several times. For about \$10.00 each I have two simple blue filtered pen lights at home for that purpose – and ophthalmoscopes in every exam room. To be fair, they do have a slit lamp avail – that is something I don't have and most FPs don't have.

I will not send this out until we can add the balloon experience.

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Well, so much for the balloon. Up again at 3:30 am. Canceled, again for excess wind. No further opportunity.

So, this missive has now sat here about 10 days and one more trip. In fact. We leave Wanaka in 2 days. My last day is tomorrow. On Call. While here, I have done by 1 – 4 more call days than anybody else in the practice. But, then that is WHY one hires a locums – to use and abuse, so you can get some time off – AND they pay me, while the partners, don't make anything extra for call. ONE more day to dodge a medical disaster on my watch. Please, dear God, make it so.

We had one day free so we drove up to the Mount Cook (Akaroa, if you are PC and re-naming everything by what the Maori say they used to call every mountain, tree, bush, bird, stream). Absolutely gorgeous day. Took short hike to get good views, rewarded with wild flowers both in the Alpine area and further down the road on our return.



Having just “conquered” a 3 k little hike in on a mountain trail, I had to put up with Wenche's enthusiasm for the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Wanaka Triathlon (42.2K run, 180k bike, 3.8k swim – x 0.625 to convert to miles – a LOT and in strong winds) which has grown to 1200 participants at some level (1/2 distances and other lesser races) from 26 countries. The 2<sup>nd</sup> most senior partner in our group helped to found this race and has done each yearly event. He is about 55, I think. Disgustingly fit. He openly says he is an athlete first, and a doctor only to afford his bike collection. But, he is also an excellent physician. And of course Wenche thinks he is just wonderful. A role model. “Andrew this, and Andrew that.” Nauseating, how abuse of ones body in that way so pleases my wife. And of course she was there to snap his photo approaching the finish line. He did well for his age group, but admitted the real pleasure was in beating the times of not a few in their 20s. The next day saw me pumping IV fluids into a young woman who was still vomiting from her effort the day before (first IV I have started in about 20 years).

Last Thursday, we took off for the West Catlins. The highlight of that was Riverton Rocks. A rocky terminus to the Island. The last place the sun sets in NZ (they claim). Just very pretty. Went to Cozy Nook in same area, disappointed the tourist guide promised small fishing fleet had departed about 5 years ago. Great hill top nature reserve gave pleasant views.



From there we readied ourselves for the real target by moving on up the highway to Tuatapere for the night at the 100 year old Waiiau Hotel. There were very few other choices. Ate a non-memorable meal there and spent a non-memorable night in a very dated room. But, in the morning we were blessed with 3 sheep outside our window. One of whom insisted I take her picture.



The shower, however, was a different matter. Simple, usual looking, swing the lever left or right shower control. What I did not notice or understand the significances of was the “off” position was in the middle of the rotate to the R for hot, and L for cold device – and there was no lifting or pulling out for any additional control of volume. I turned it to hot, waited a bit as per usual for the cold water in the pipes to clear and lathered up but the water got hotter and hotter. It stayed just the same hot as the handle was turned back towards neutral – just less of it. It seems it does only what it says. You want hot water, you rotate to the R. Cold water to the L. Off is in the center. You want more volume of either hot or cold, turn it further, but NEVER does it MIX hot and cold!!!! So here, I am lathered up and a choice of being scalded or frozen to get the soap off. I alternated. For a few moments having switched from one to the other the water in the shower feed mixes with that previously there – scrub, scrub, scrub VERY fast - step out of stream before freezing or boiling, switch to the other temperature. Wait 2 seconds. Jump in again, rinse, rinse, rinse VERY fast. Repeat until done.

Breakfast was included. Really special. All the Kiwis think it wonderful. Whitebait Fritters. These are dinky little fishes (maybe ¼ by 2 inches) that arrive on the West Coast of New Zealand by the millions. Sort of like “smelt” on the WA rivers, but much smaller. Of course they are eaten whole (head, eyes, guts) and usually mixed with a bit of egg, flour and seasoning into a Fritter. Everyone else was thrilled at the opportunity. They also had several swimming-in-grease dead pig products to select from. Oh, of course, they would. Did I mention the big sign that announced Tuatapere’s claim to fame? The Sausage Capital of New Zealand!!! We were content with our Weatbix (wheat flakes compressed into flat bricks) from the classic tin. These are the foundation of the largest breakfast food empire in Australia and New Zealand: Sanitarium Foods – owned by our own SDA church. They make all kinds of packaged cereals, peanut butter, and meat analogues (genuine fake hot-dogs, bacon, or burgers).

The drive from there – with stops a really nice nature reserve just out of town for a morning hike - and another to marvel at the Clinton Suspension Bridge (longest in NZ when built in 1899 of from totara and Australian hardwood) – was to Te Anau, gateway to Milford Sound. Ate lunch there at a Western (as in old US West, cowboys, etc themed place with serviceable, but again not memorable fare and Wenche checked out shops, buying nothing. From there the about 120 k ride to Milford Sound is one of the grandest in NZ. Our trip was tempered by overcast skies and occasional rain. Odds are good for this, it does so 200 days per year in this region, making for, of course, incredible rain forest that rival the Hoh on the Olympic Peninsula.



Milford Sound is the most well known of two fjords semi-accessible overland. The other, Doubtful Sound, is much larger, but an all day affair by boat across lake Manipuri, then bus (which having been barged over has no place else to go) to the power station and down to the fjord, for a boat ride out to the Tasman sea – this one we did not do but if given the choice time-wise is the better one (we did both 5 yrs ago). Our time was limited. So much so that we paid an unseemly amount to sleep on the Milford sound in one of two purpose-built boats. The sound was beautiful,

and mystical in clouds and mist and lots of water flowing. Sheer glacier scoured rock walls of several hundred feet are threaded by numerous waterfalls – many of which run only for a day or so after a good rain. There is very little soil on top of these cliffs and that water falls quickly runs off. So fast and

voluminous are the rain fed falls that the fresh water forms a distinct 5 – 10 foot layer on top of the warmer and denser salt water that fill the remaining 300 – 500 foot deep sound. That phenomenon results in very unique marine flora and is thus a marine preserve—within the sound. But outside the sound are crab pots, and when the tuna are running boats. Last week a single fisherman, for a lark too his commercial boat out and pulled in 6 ton of Tuna. Because the walls are so steep the captain takes the prow of the ship to within inches of the rock face into selected waterfalls without risk to its hull. The first evening the sea was too rough to leave the 10k long sound, so we got to take another run at it the next AM – seeing the sound again, in clear morning light of a glorious rain free day.

The geology is all young here. The forest, however, are “old” Pollen studies compare the forests plants here in Milford Sound with that of the Jurassic and Cambrian periods. They are similar to those that thrived once on Antarctica, before it was ice covered. Documentaries on Dinosaurs are filmed here (i.e. “Walking with Dinosaurs” by David Attenborough).



The first day, they took us out on a motorized “tender” – metal craft that could slowly prowl the few inlets with mini beaches of rock or pebble looking for wild life. Got up close and personal to a pied shag (cormorant), and a group of seals. But Wenche, really, really wanted to see a Fjord land yellow crested penguin – very rare. So when our trip was over and another group from the only 60 passengers was to board she asked if we could stay for a 2<sup>nd</sup> outing – sure enough two were spotted – in the brush, took far and took dark to get a good picture (certainly not good enough to share), but adequate to document it was the penguin she sought.

They fed us very well that night (chicken, venison, beef, lamb, numerous salads and deserts. Breakfast was OK.



The other bird Wenche has wanted to see is the Kea. The worlds only alpine parrot lives only in the mountains of the South Island. 5 years ago, she was trilled just to see the flutter of wings high in some trees on a guided (\$\$) nature trek taken mostly for that purpose. On this return trip she got her chance.

One of the brighter of these rare birds has set up his own toll booth at the entrance to the 1 mile tunnel through solid rock used to enter or leave the Milford Valley. He boldly struts up to cars and expects to be fed. “Ya wanna use my tunnel? Feed me.” “I’ve got a sharp beak, and sharp talons, You like your shiny car to stay that way? Feed me.” “I also enjoy shredding rubber – nice windscreen seal you have there.” He of course said “windscreen” instead of “windshield” as he is Kiwi. He walked up to my passenger side, so I rolled the window down to take his picture. He obliged. But, as we had a 15 minute wait for our direction through the one-way tunnel I got out of the car to take pictures of the magnificent scenery. A few moments later I hear Wenche shouting – “RICHARD, he is coming into the car!” I turned to find the bandit firmly grabbing the passenger side mirror peering in through the OPEN window – again asking “What part about feeding me did you not understand?” That is Wenche’s visage caught in the mirror reflection. Notice the look of “delight” on her face. I rescued Wenche (and the car) with a few cashews and a bit of “One Square Meal” replacement bar. He preferred the sweater bar, but ate all of our offering.



On the way out (same road) we enjoyed Mirror Lake – roadside, easy access – just pretty ponds that when the water is still reflect the mountains. Paradise Shelduck, Grey teal and Scaup were on it. And of course some walks in the primeval forests with the giant tree ferns.

On one of our walks we encountered the NZ Robin. He is an old friend. He loves people walking on “his” forest trails. We stir up the gravel and detritus, thus exposing insects for his cuisine. 5 years ago, one such bird was so comfortable with this process he just hopped on my boot and rode, keeping a keen look out for his prey, jumping off to dine, and hopping back on for a few more feet. Probably went 30 yards this way,

with me dragging my feet a bit to be especially helpful. He seemed to appreciate my efforts.

The rest of the way home was pretty much “old” news to us. More beauty, More beauty, and More beauty. It gets so monotonous. Herds of domesticated venison on the hoof mostly for the German market are everywhere. Their antler fuzz is harvested for the Asian market to assist male virility. [The one photo of rain forest, really belongs back up with the road out of Milford Sound, the rest are between Te Anau and across the Crown Ridge out of Queenstown to Wanaka]





Back home, Wenche got the baking bug when I brought home a Healthy Cooking Magazine from the office featuring on its cover an Apple Blueberry Crumble Cake ("It has FOUR apples in it - the healthy part). I only laid it around. SHE decided to make the cake. She WANTS to make the cake. She PROMISES to make the cake. Then she can not find the recepie in the magazine. I point out the tell-tale signs that someone had ripped the page frm the magazine. Such a CRIME. Fortunately, the grocery store, late in the month, still had a few of that issue around. I just finished the last DELICIOUS (and healthy, got to be, it was in that magazine). Wenche is also getting the hang of a convection oven we have never owned.



Yesterday, 24 Jan, Wenche went with her walking group again, several hours on minimally evident trails (above) around Arrowtown (GREAT bakery with fresh wonderful olive bread and sticky-buns at "Provisions," just NE of the main downtown, wonderful smoked tuna and salmon at Fresh (I think) Brothers, and expensive boutique shopping and an sort of turn of century, Disneyland Main

Street town)

Today, as I work final office day (no patients yet this afternoon while I play with sending this) took the bus into Queenstown and returns with the car we have rented for the next 5 weeks. The next practice in Rotorua will pay us for the car for the time we are there (actually a few dollars less, as I booked a bit more expensive Ford Focus, over the Toyota Corolla they had selected). We leave the next day – taking our time up the West Coast. Hitting THREE (count them, 3) Bird sanctuary tours (all with limited, protected access). AND, as I prepare this to send, it begins to RAIN !!! Supposed to be SUMMER!!